

Wednesday, September 24, 2008

From the Coeur d'Alene Press

- Education Corridor moves forward
- Deal is done, but work isn't (Editorial)
- College enrollments on the rise

From the Spokesman-Review

- Standardized testing report recommends changes to college admissions

From the Moscow Pullman Daily News (password required)

- No new education news stories posted online today.

From the Lewiston Tribune (password required)

- USDA grants put fresh produce in schools Tribune
- Potlatch School Board, teachers sign pact

From the Idaho-Press Tribune, Nampa

- Idaho State prepares contingency budget plans
- Medical school isn't realistic for Idaho (Editorial)

From the Idaho Statesman

- 30 elementaries get grants for fruit, veggies
- Tom Luna: Idaho has made strides in education, but more is needed

From the Twin Falls Times-News

- Style, art and spinning tops
- Idaho State prepares contingency budget plans

From the Idaho State Journal (password Required)

- District weighs new boundaries
- District 25 requests face uphill battle
- Educators step out of character for library fundraiser
- Senate OKs four-year extension of program for rural schools
- Officials: Too early to judge effect of nation's economic woes on bond levies

From the Idaho Falls Post Register (password required)

- Idaho State University prepares budget plans
- Schools awarded fresh fruit, veggie grants

FROM THE COEUR D'ALENE PRESS

Education Corridor moves forward

NIC Board of Trustees says now is time to look at future development of property

COEUR d'ALENE -- It's a done deal.

That was the word from North Idaho College representatives at Tuesday's community forum as they discussed the college's plan to purchase the DeArmond Mill site for use as part of an envisioned higher education corridor adjacent to the NIC campus in downtown Coeur d'Alene.

The two-hour forum, promoted as an opportunity for citizens to sit down with public officials and educational leaders to discuss the proposed education corridor project, brought roughly 50 people to the noon meeting at the Midtown Meeting Center.

"I think this is a point that we need to kind of come to grips with. As a board of trustees, we have chosen to take the foregone taxes and start moving forward with the purchase of the property. Now, you can question whether or not you think that's a prudent decision. We as a board think it's a prudent decision and we have voted to start the process and we've got the MOU signed to start moving forward. I think what's probably a more legitimate concern is how the property is going to be developed in the future," NIC trustee Mic Armon said.

Trustees agreed earlier this month to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with Black Rock developer Marshall Chesrown to purchase the 17-acre mill site property from him for \$10 million.

They previously approved collecting \$2.4 million in foregone taxes from county property owners to go toward purchasing the property.

The city and its urban renewal agency, Lake City Development Corp. and the University of Idaho are also part of the education corridor's building development plans.

Lewis-Clark State College, Idaho State University and Boise State University will all have a presence in the corridor.

Some who attended the forum voiced support for the project, while others had concerns.

Many of the questions centered on whether the downtown location was the best choice for the college's expansion, if the \$10 million price tag is justified and what the future cost would be to taxpayers.

Armon said there would be no "massive" cost to taxpayers other than what would be reflected in their tax bills -- about a \$32 increase for the owner of a \$300,000 home.

He said trustees are looking at "every option available" to find other sources of funding to support development of the property.

NIC President Priscilla Bell confirmed there is the potential for North Idaho College to sell portions of the 17 acres along Northwest Boulevard to "another entity" to be commercially developed.

Trustee candidate Dick Phenneger, who is running against incumbent Judy Meyer in the November election, said because taxpayers will have to pay something toward building on the property, there should be a plan to show them how that will be funded.

"That has not come across in one way, shape or other," Phenneger said.

Coeur d'Alene resident Dan Gookin said he believes it would be possible for NIC to purchase the land for "far less" than the \$10 million.

The college recently received the results of a commercial appraisal indicating the land has a market value of \$13.25 million.

Gookin said he would have encouraged the college to get three appraisals.

"If you guys would be more aggressive in getting an appraisal, you could lower the price, get your property and save us some money," Gookin said. "But, I think the most egregious thing missing from this report is the fact that the property you are purchasing is right next to a wastewater treatment facility."

Gookin read from a risk management plan filed with the Environmental Protection Agency by the city's wastewater treatment plant indicating that a potential hazard, "a worst-case scenario," exists that could affect residents within 1.3 miles of the plant, should a cylinder of chemicals used to disinfect the city's wastewater rupture while being moved into the wastewater treatment plant's storage building.

Gookin said his concern is that the presence of the wastewater treatment plant is not adequately considered in the appraisal the college has.

"I think, Dan, your comments, and this needs to be stated for the press here, are wildly alarmist. Every time you read any EPA document, any risk management plan, any fiduciary responsibility proposal about a tax, look at a stock report, anything terrible could happen, absolutely they could," said city councilman Mike Kennedy. "To me, it's a great thing to hear all this feedback. It's a good thing to hear people's concerns in an open forum but this has been fairly unrelenting in its negativity and there are an entire universe of people in this community that 100 percent support this project."

Wendy Gabriel, the city administrator, confirmed that chlorine and sulfur dioxide are stored at the city's wastewater treatment plant.

She said, to the EPA, storage of these types of chemicals at a wastewater treatment plant is "a routine matter."

"They came and did an inspection a couple weeks ago. They were absolutely flabbergasted with our facility -- how clean it is, how well-maintained. Every physical aspect of our plant was approved," Gabriel said.

Gookin said he's not concerned about the safety of the plant, but that the property could possibly be purchased at a lower price to taxpayers because of the wastewater plant's proximity.

Mayor Sandi Bloem said the property could be sold for more than \$10 million

"I can tell you that for sure. We're not going to get it any cheaper," Bloem said.

Mike Dodge, a builder, developer and homeowner in Coeur d'Alene, said in his business dealings working in homes in the Fort Grounds and Sanders Beach neighborhoods, he sees this as a "bargain."

"It's an opportunity that shouldn't be passed up," Dodge said.

Another forum is scheduled Thursday from 7 to 9 a.m. in the Lake Coeur d'Alene Room of North Idaho College's Edminster Student Union Building.

Deal is done, but work isn't (Editorial)

Fact: North Idaho College is going to spend \$10 million on 17 acres formerly known as the DeArmond Mill site.

Fact: Taxpayers are going to pay for it. On average, the person owning a \$300,000 home in Kootenai County will see a \$32 increase in annual property tax bills to pay for the property.

Fact: The purchase will give our region's higher education leaders the latitude to co-locate future facilities, something they've identified for many years as an ideal.

Fact: There is a strong likelihood that the increased property tax level will outlive this specific land purchase.

Fact: NIC trustees are not going to put the matter to a public vote, advisory or otherwise.

Fact: The purchase makes sense in terms of geographical logistics and economically, as well, when compared to the appraisal which estimated its value around \$13.25 million.

Fact: In terms of the education corridor, Coeur d'Alene's wastewater treatment plant is both an asset and a liability. To the extent University of Idaho incorporates the plant into its academic

offerings, it is an asset. Its presence can also be seen as lowering the value of the overall property purchase.

Fact: Even though the property purchase may be executed soon, it could be many years before NIC builds anything on the newly acquired land.

Fiction: With the decision now clearly enunciated, there is no call for further citizen feedback or participation.

Yes, during Tuesday's education corridor forum, a number of citizens were surprised to learn that arguing over the prudence of the land purchase is now a moot point. The trustees will close on the property as soon as possible.

That leaves some prepared to continue to argue the point, to recommend alternatives and perhaps to criticize the decision-makers. That's probably all fair game, but it would also constitute a waste of time and energy.

The same officials who hosted Tuesday's forum will be back at it again, starting at 7 a.m. Thursday in the Lake Coeur d'Alene Room of NIC's Edminster Student Union Building. In our humble opinion, that should be the start of new conversations between corridor supporters and critics to determine how the expansion can do the most good for our community.

College enrollments on the rise

Some report record gains, despite fears over worsening economy

Dan Hansen
Staff writer
September 24, 2008

The poor economy has not meant fewer students this year at Inland Northwest colleges and universities.

In fact, as fall quarter begins, most schools are reporting strong freshmen enrollments, including some records.

Whitworth, Gonzaga and Washington State universities all have reported their largest-ever crops of freshmen. And while it's still too early to nail down a precise number, it's looking like a near-record at Eastern Washington University, where classes start today.

"We're right on pace – and I mean right on pace – to meet last year's head count," but fall short of 2005's record, EWU spokesman Dave Meany said.

Whitman College is reporting its second-largest class of newcomers. The Walla Walla school hasn't seen more freshmen since 1978.

The University of Idaho reported earlier this month that it has nearly 5 percent more incoming freshmen this year than in 2007, a bump the university attributes to aggressive recruiting that ended a five-year enrollment slump. And North Idaho College has reported a 4.4 percent increase over last year.

Although not a given, hard times can bring more students to community colleges, which can be "an affordable place to start their educations," said Anne Tucker, public information officer for Community Colleges of Spokane. She noted that tuition this year increased 5 percent to 7 percent at Washington's four-year state universities, but only 2 percent at community colleges.

Because fall classes only started Monday – and because students can come any time of year – it's difficult to get exact enrollment figures for Spokane and Spokane Falls community colleges, Tucker said. But numbers appear to be up from last year, she said.

Fred Pfursich, Whitworth's vice president of admissions and financial aid, said university officials responded to the declining economy a year ago by deciding to send letters of acceptance to more freshman applicants than normal. They assumed more than usual would decline for financial reasons. And while that proved true, Whitworth still exceeded its self-imposed limit of 2 percent annual enrollment growth.

"Our freshman class was slightly larger than we would have wanted, but we were OK with that" because some private colleges in other parts of the country are having trouble meeting goals, Pfursich said.

Buoyed by factors that include good press, good sports teams and a stronger outreach effort, Whitworth saw a record number of freshman applicants – double the number of just two years ago, and an increase of 481 percent since 1993.

Whitman College also saw more applicants than ever before, despite an estimated cost of about \$45,000 a year for families who don't receive financial aid.

That meant both schools could be selective about who they let in, with Whitman admitting just 45 percent of applicants. Among the college's 430 freshmen are 187 who were in the top 10 percent of their class and 188 who held high school leadership positions such as class president, newspaper editor, varsity sports captain or founder of an organization, according to the college Web page.

At Whitworth, the average freshman has a 3.7 GPA. That compares to about 3.4 at Washington State University and University of Idaho, and about 3.3 at Eastern Washington University.

Aiming at more top-tier students, WSU announced Tuesday that it will guarantee admission to applicants who rank in the top 10 percent of their class, or have earned at least a 3.5 GPA in high school – regardless of how they've done on SATs, the high-stress college entrance exams.

"One way to make top-performing students feel more appreciated and welcomed at WSU is to remove the pressure associated with waiting for that acceptance letter," said John Fraire, vice president for enrollment management.

FROM THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Standardized testing report recommends changes to college admissions

Local officials say ACT, SAT scores not the only determining factor in admissions process
By Halley Griffin, Daily News staff writer

Posted on: Tuesday, September 23, 2008

Joe Sudar took the SAT three times in high school and the ACT once.

The Washington State University freshman said high school students consider SAT and ACT scores to be determining factors for getting them into college, but he doesn't think so much weight should be put on standardized test scores.

"The questions didn't seem like they did a good job of testing what you learned in high school," Sudar said.

The Commission on the Use of Standardized Tests in Undergraduate Admissions agrees. It released a report today that recommends reducing the emphasis placed on standardized test scores in college admissions.

The commission was formed by the National Association for College Admission Counseling, and spent a year conducting research for its report. It found that standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT "may not be critical" in making good admissions decisions.

The commission cited other tests, such as advanced placement tests in various subjects, the International Baccalaureate exam and SAT Subject Tests, that are more closely aligned with high school curriculum and are better indicators of undergraduate success.

The report recommends that federal and state governments design a "college readiness assessment mechanism" that better aligns with high school curriculum, and that colleges and universities consider differences in access to test preparation when making admission decisions.

WSU Vice President of Enrollment Management John Fraire agreed there is too much emphasis placed on standardized tests.

"I think SATs often play more of a role in preventing students from going to college," Fraire said.

In a move unrelated to the report, WSU announced a change in undergraduate admissions procedures today. Beginning next year, in-state students who graduate from high school in the top 10 percent of their classes or with a grade-point average higher than 3.5 automatically will be granted admission.

"For those that don't meet the 10 percent or the 3.5, we'll continue to do a holistic review of their application," he said, noting that test scores are just one part of that review.

University of Idaho Director of Admissions and Financial Aid Services Dan Davenport said he views standardized test scores as one tool that can be used to predict a student's success.

The UI only uses applicants' test scores in certain cases, such as for students who finished high school with a grade point average lower than 3.0. The university has used this system for at least 15 years, Davenport said.

"To me, all of those are tools you can use to determine a student's success," he said. "Our job in admissions is to find students who we think can be successful at the University of Idaho."

New Saint Andrews College Executive Vice President Bob Hieronymus said NSA has found SAT and ACT scores to be "generally reliable indicators of future undergraduate success."

"But our admissions committee never considers them apart from the context of the rest of the application," he said, adding that NSA also requires prospective students to submit three essays, high school transcripts and three different evaluations.

FROM THE MOSCOW PULLMAN DAILY NEWS (PASSWORD REQUIRED)

No new education news stories posted online today.

FROM THE LEWISTON TRIBUNE (PASSWORD REQUIRED)

USDA grants put fresh produce in schools Tribune

Wednesday, September 24, 2008

Idaho Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Luna announced Tuesday 30 elementary schools, including seven in this region, have received grants to provide healthy and nutritious snacks to students.

The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program is part of a U.S. Department of Agriculture plan to offer schools a wider variety of fresh produce than would be available through normal USDA programs, such as the National School Lunch Program. Idaho was one of 13 states to pilot the program, which has since been expanded to all 50 states.

As part of the program, Highland schools in Craigmont will get \$5,714, Juliaetta Elementary will receive \$15,137, Kamiah is slated for \$16,541, Lapwai will get \$13,333, Orchards Elementary in Lewiston will receive \$13,784, Riggins Elementary in the Salmon River District will get \$3,459, and Timberline Elementary in the Orofino district will receive \$5,764.

"The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program is a great way for Idaho educators to not only provide students with healthier snack options throughout the school day, but to also teach students about the importance of healthy eating habits," Luna said.

Schools receive reimbursement for providing the snacks to students, but the fresh fruits and vegetables must be provided at a different time than the school lunch or breakfast programs. The schools were awarded the grants through a competitive application process.

More information about Child Nutrition Programs at the Idaho State Department of Education is available online at www.sde.idaho.gov/site/cnp/.

Potlatch School Board, teachers sign pact

Wednesday, September 24, 2008

POTLATCH - The 2008-09 negotiated agreement between the Potlatch School District and teachers has been ratified, adopted by the board and signed by both parties, Superintendent Joe Kren said Tuesday.

Earlier this year, the school district and teachers' association reached an impasse during negotiations over salaries and benefits.

Teachers will receive a 2.5 percent increase on their base pay, and the index on the pay schedule was equalized, Kren said.

"We will be issuing individual teacher contracts reflecting any changes as a result of the new agreement as soon as possible," Kren said.

FROM THE IDAHO-PRESS TRIBUNE, NAMPA

Idaho State prepares contingency budget plans

POCATELLO, Idaho (AP) -- Idaho State University is preparing to scale back on planned construction in case Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter decides to cut spending from the state's general fund.

Last week Otter ordered top state administrators, institution leaders and department heads to revisit their 2009 budgets and find ways to save money to offset a nearly 6 percent projected shortfall in state revenue. In a letter to the administrators, Otter said the revisions are necessary because the downturns in the state and national economies that have left Idaho's general fund with \$174.3 million less than anticipated.

James Fletcher, ISU's vice president of finance, told the Idaho State Journal that the school anticipated the nation's declining economy and made provisions earlier this year to prepare for cuts on nonpersonnel spending. For instance, the university held onto the state's special equipment and ongoing general expense money - using it as a savings account of sorts instead of distributing the money to its departments - until it had time to see how the economy progressed.

"We saw (the special equipment) fund as being a potential provision. So, we didn't distribute it yet," he said.

The Legislature provided nearly \$2 million for ISU's special equipment budget, and the state allocated about \$74.4 million for the university's general ongoing expenses last year.

Like other departments and institutions around the state, ISU is preparing three potential spending reduction plans:- a cut of more than \$744,000, about 1 percent of the total budget; a cut of about \$1.4 million or 2 percent of the budget; and a cut of \$1.8 million, or 2.5 percent of the budget.

Medical school isn't realistic for Idaho (Editorial)

Updated 15 hours 16 minutes ago Idaho, like many less-populated states in the country, is asking itself what can be done to address the increasing need for doctors.

Idaho State University President Arthur Vailas is pushing the idea of a statewide medical education program. Some are even talking about building a new medical school in Idaho.

We don't think that would be a good idea. There aren't many states that are bursting at the seams with extra money right now, and the Gem State is no exception. Starting a quality medical school and maintaining it takes a lot of funds, and Gov. Butch Otter is already asking state agencies to find ways to pare back their budgets as it is.

FROM THE IDAHO STATESMAN

30 elementaries get grants for fruit, veggies

- STATESMAN STAFF

Edition Date: 09/24/08

Thirty elementary schools across the state have been awarded grants to bring fresh fruits and vegetables to students.

State Schools Superintendent Tom Luna said the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program provides students with healthier snack options throughout the school day and helps teach students about the importance of healthy eating habits.

Southern Idaho schools and the amounts awarded are: Shadow Butte Elementary, Emmett, \$17,994; Willow Creek Elementary, Nampa, \$33,583; Holmes Elementary, Wilder, \$20,852; Marsing Elementary, Marsing, \$20,501; Payette Primary School, Payette, \$27,568; Shadow Butte Elementary, Emmett, \$17,994.96; and Willow Creek Elementary, Nampa, \$33,583.91.

Tom Luna: Idaho has made strides in education, but more is needed

READER'S VIEW PUBLIC EDUCATION

BY TOM LUNA - Idaho Statesman

Edition Date: 09/24/08

As students across the state head back to school this year, I am excited about the many ways in which we have worked together to improve Idaho's public education system to better meet all students' needs.

Since I took office, my staff and I have been working diligently to address long-standing issues, such as directing more money into the classroom, raising student achievement and removing unnecessary barriers to teaching, and we have made great progress.

For the second year in a row, we are directing more money into the classroom. With the support of the governor and Legislature, every classroom teacher will have \$350 to spend on supplies and materials. School districts will have an additional \$5 million to provide assistance to students who struggle and another \$10 million to replace outdated and worn-out textbooks.

This fall, the Idaho Math Initiative will give educators the tools they need to raise student achievement in math and to better prepare students for life after high school. The Math Initiative provides professional development for Idaho's teachers and offers an innovative online

instruction tool to supplement classroom instruction, assisting students who struggle as well as high-achieving students who need a more challenging curriculum.

Because of this focused effort and the dedication of Idaho's great teachers, we saw some tremendous gains in student achievement this year. More than 360 Idaho schools reached the goals of No Child Left Behind this year, up from 168 schools the previous year. Our youngest students improved their reading skills, too: For the first time, more than 70 percent of students reached grade level in reading by the end of third grade.

I applaud these successes we've had over the past year, but I realize we have so much more to do.

We must develop a pay-for-performance plan that will finally recognize and reward Idaho's great teachers. Why? Because we are still losing too many great teachers to school administration and the private sector. Just like other professionals across Idaho, teachers deserve the opportunity to earn more money based on their job performance.

We need to implement a statewide plan to offer college and professional-technical courses to Idaho's high school students. A task force is developing this plan and will have recommendations ready for the Legislature in 2009.

Working with educators and parents, we have done great things to improve education across Idaho.

I am determined to build on these successes and work hard to further raise student achievement and meet the needs of all Idaho students so they will be successful in the 21st century.

Tom Luna is Idaho superintendent of public instruction.

FROM THE TWIN FALLS TIMES-NEWS

Style, art and spinning tops

Asian culture comes to life at College of Southern Idaho

By Ben Botkin

Times-News writer

They spun tops, flew kites and drew art.

They painted masks, practiced judo and printed fish artwork.

The activities created a colorful kaleidoscope at the College of Southern Idaho that reflected Asian culture on Tuesday afternoon. Scores of students, children and parents descended onto the campus for the second annual Fall Children's Festival that was overseen by the Asian Student Organization.

Jin Sohn, president of ASO, played with a Korean top spin. He kept the top spinning by hitting it with a string at the end of a stick. Normally, the sport is played on the ice, but on Tuesday he had to make do with a concrete slab.

Later, 11-year-old Austin Blackwell of Twin Falls tried it out for the first time. He kept the top spinning.

"At first, it gets difficult, but then every time, you keep getting better and better," he said. "Sooner or later, you get tired and have to stop."

The CSI Anime Club showed attendees how to draw simple drawings patterned after Japanese cartoons and had masks for children to paint.

Justin Goicoechea, a Twin Falls resident, quickly drew an outline of a mouse making a peace sign.

"With this style of art, you can make anything into a cartoon," he said.

Six-year-old Gabriel Movius of Twin Falls flew a kite. He said making the kite was the most fun.

"It was kind of hard, but now it's all done," he said.

His mother, Amy Movius, said it was difficult getting the kites up because the wind wasn't very strong.

Not far away, several members of CSI's Judo Club gave a demonstration of their skills. Ben White of Buhl and Chris Carney of Twin Falls tried out their judo match skills and grappled each other.

"You find out a lot about who are," White said. "We've definitely seen how far we're willing to push ourselves."

John Boling, advisor for the Asian Student Organization, gave a demonstration of Japanese fish printing. He took the body of a tilapia fish and put it against newspapers and stretched out the fins with pins. Then, he put a layer of ink over the fish 念191;?念191;?" except for the eye - and pressed paper against it.

The result: an image of the fish on paper in ink. Once he painted the eye in, the picture was complete. Some were clearer pictures, depending on how much ink was used.

"Some of them are just better than others," Boling said.

Idaho State prepares contingency budget plans

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FROM THE IDAHO STATE JOURNAL (PASSWORD REQUIRED)

District weighs new boundaries

Plan affects three main high schools

BY CASEY SANTEE
csantee@journalnet.com

POCATELLO — Bart Reed stood in front of four maps detailing the various options for redrawing District 25's high school boundaries as a handful of inquisitive citizens commented and asked questions Tuesday in Century High's media center.

The public meeting was the first of three slated to gather input about the issue. Those in attendance were asked to fill out a one-page survey about which of the options they favored and why. District officials will review the information at the Oct. 28 School Board meeting.

The other meetings will be Thursday at 6:30 p.m. in the Highland High School cafeteria and Sept. 30 at 6:30 p.m. in the Pocatello High School media center.

Reed, the district's business manager, said this is the first time in a decade the boundaries have been redrawn. That was the year before Century High School opened its doors.

"There are some who believe that all three schools should be as equally enrolled as possible," Reed said, adding that options 2 and 3 best provide for this concept.

He said that other people believe that enrollment should be based on the capacity of the buildings.

As the meeting continued, many more purposes for each option surfaced, including what choosing one over another would do to a particular high school's athletic status.

For example, options two and three could be bad for Highland because they would cause it to drop to division 4A from its current status as a 5A athletic school.

"Right now, Highland struggles as the smallest 5A school to stay in that 5A category," Reed said.

But that was exactly why Dane Jorgensen, a 1995 graduate of Pocatello High, favored option 3.

"I grew up here in Pocatello and played basketball for Poky," Jorgensen said. "Back then, all the schools were in the same division and the competition was close. Very rarely were there blowouts. That brought the community in. I think they've lost that a little bit because Highland is bigger and they have the advantage."

Mike Ennis, who lives near Century High School in Bannock County, said he chose option 3 because it favors Century more than the other options, although he said the whole issue is beside the point.

Ennis said that the real issue is the city blocking development near Century High School, which is why the district finds itself needing to redraw the boundaries.

"When you have a big facility sitting in a field and for 10 years there's nothing happening around it ... you guys have a lot of pull in this community," he said to Reed. After handing the surveys to those in attendance, Reed encouraged them to write in comments rather than just choosing an option. "We want to hear the good, bad and the ugly, if you will," Reed said.

District 25 requests face uphill battle

Pocatello/Chubbuck School District 25 wants taxpayers to pony up some money—possibly more than \$14 million. The good news, if it can be called that, is district voters will be able to approve or nix the expenditures during two votes this winter.

The first vote will likely be for a supplemental levy—money to keep the district afloat during the current nationwide economic crisis. District officials make their case for this money by pointing out the 14 to 15 percent increase during the past year in the school system's fixed cost expenses, such as insurance, utilities and gasoline.

District administrators and the school board are still figuring out how much money they will seek for these expenses but it should be at least \$6 million. The vote will likely occur in February.

Another vote could happen in March and it would be for between \$8 million and \$8.5 million to nearly double the student capacity of Edahow Elementary School. The board will soon decide

whether to move forward with the project and its required public vote. The district is reeling from an increase of 170 elementary students this school year, a jump that's not been seen in more than a decade.

To cope with the increase, District 25 hopes to expand Edahow's student capacity from its current 350 to 650.

The district is certainly in a tough spot in trying to meet its own financial needs as well as provide for students while the economy takes a toll on folks in Southeast Idaho and nationwide.

With everyone tightening their belts these days, it could be a very tough sell to persuade taxpayers to pump millions into the district when they themselves are having trouble paying for basics such as food, housing and gasoline.

District 25 deserves credit, however, for making public its needs well before the votes. The district will surely have to mount a pretty extensive educational campaign if it wants voters to support these bond elections.

It was disappointing a few weeks back when the district announced its need for a \$300,000 emergency levy at the start of Labor Day weekend, with the vote slated for the Tuesday after Labor Day. District officials said the money was needed because of higher fuel costs for busing, the hiring of more staff to handle the increasing student population and to make up for money lost when local businesses successfully appealed their tax assessments.

The school board approved the expenditure with little public debate, likely a result of the holiday weekend and short notice on the matter.

This time the levy amounts are much higher, necessitating voter approval, and there will be plenty of time for the district to make its case and for critics to make theirs.

The supplemental levy requires simple majority approval and the district probably has reason to feel confident this will pass because the community has a history of supporting these expenditures.

The expansion of Edahow, on the other hand, would need a two-thirds majority vote to become a reality. That might be a tougher fight for the district, especially if the news on the economic front continues to be dismal.

There's no question that District 25's needs are real.

But voters will have the final say on the question of urgency.

Educators step out of character for library fundraiser

BY JOHN BULGER

jbulger@journalnet.com

POCATELLO — An overflow crowd of local women turned out Tuesday afternoon at Pocatello City Council chambers to support the Marshall Public Library's NickelMania project to help fund a bookmobile.

Many treated the event as if it were a high tea, attired in big hats and finery while nibbling on candies and sipping punch ... and listening to rap music.

"MC" Mary Vagner, accompanied by her homeys "Snoop Dog" Patti Mortensen and "Eminem" Shelley Allen, gave the audience a semi-musical rendition of School District 25's

take on the bookmobile program — “Welcome to Nickel Mania/Just 5 cents, it’s not gonna strain ya” — to the more than polite applause of the audience.

Former library board member Jackie Block gave compelling testimony to the worth of books.

“My name is Jackie, and I’m an addict,” she said. “I can’t get through the day without a book.”

Block spoke of discovering the library as a child of little financial means.

“Books became my friends, books became my passports,” she said. “Many children today have limited access to books. Please help us help these children.”

The NickelMania project was born during recent centennial celebrations, when staff and Friends of the Library members decided to ask the community what it most desired of the institution in its second century. The library sent out a community survey, piggybacked with water bills, requesting input. Eighty two percent of respondents indicated they wanted to see a bookmobile.

The proposed 24-foot bookmobile will cost approximately \$150,000. The fundraising project asks for donations of a nickel for each year of age. From Oct. 24-26, volunteers will collect the nickels in a drive which will include donations from area school children and businesses.

The gathering was also serenaded by six singers, dubbed the “Ka-Ching Sisters,” who opted for more traditional fare with a rejiggered rendition of “Music Music Music,” now “Nickels Nickels Nickels.”

Idaho State University English professor Susan Swetnam captivated the women with a brief history of Pocatello’s library.

“Public libraries in the U.S. would not exist as we know them without women,” Swetnam said.

Swetnam recounted how a group of dedicated women at the turn of the 20th century worked tirelessly to bring a Carnegie-funded library to Pocatello, expertly sidestepping a recalcitrant city council, one member who termed the project “a humbug.”

“Idealistic, smart, public women can still make a difference,” she told the appreciative crowd.

Senate OKs four-year extension of program for rural schools

BY JOURNAL STAFF

The U.S. Senate on Tuesday approved a four-year extension of the “county payments” program, nearly doubling the funds it provides to Idaho’s rural schools from \$24 million to \$42 million annually.

“The goal of America’s public school system should be to provide every student with a world-class education, but in Idaho, as in other states, rural counties — especially those with large areas of public lands which do not contribute tax revenues to schools — have been impeded in meeting that promise,” said U.S. Sen. Larry Craig, co-sponsor of the initiative. “(Tuesday’s) action marks a comprehensive extension of the legislation Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden and I convinced the Congress to pass in 2000 to provide a transitional funding stream for rural schools.”

The original Craig/Wyden Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 established a six-year payment formula for counties that receive revenue sharing payments for U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands. The formula, based on timber receipts, provided a dedicated funding stream for rural schools which cannot collect property taxes — the schools’ primary source of funding — from federal forests and range lands.

Craig said the bill passed by the Senate Tuesday is a four-year extension of the Secure Rural Schools act combined with the Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program for counties losing much of their tax base due to large amounts of (BLM) lands.

After Congress failed to immediately renew the original Craig/Wyden authorization when it expired in September 2006, Craig succeeded in convincing the Congress to approve a one-year extension. He again pushed the Senate to okay another one-year extension earlier this year, but the House of Representatives did not agree.

Craig said that without the funding in the Senate-passed bill, 120 Idaho teachers would lose their jobs because the county payments program provides one-third of the budget for some rural school districts in the State. The legislation, which now goes to the House of Representatives for approval, impacts nine million children in rural America, he said.

Officials: Too early to judge effect of nation's economic woes on bond levies

POCATELLO — School District 25 officials said it is too early to say how the nation's financial meltdown will affect a pair of bond levies they will likely seek early next year.

Shelley Allen, district spokeswoman, said trustees and administrators will discuss the matter at upcoming board work sessions in October.

"I think it's still too early to say," Allen said.

The district will have a special election for its biennial supplemental bond levy in February. Last time it was on the ballot in 2007, it passed for \$6 million. It is unclear how much the 2009 levy amount will be. Officials said they should have that number determined by late this year.

In addition, the district could ask the public for between \$8 and \$8.5 million to fund an expansion to Edahow Elementary, nearly doubling the school's capacity from 350 to 650 students. However, officials say that other options for dealing with elementary school overcrowding remain on the table, including moving the district's sixth-graders into the three middle schools. They could also be placed all together into a building, such as the Alameda Center, a former junior high school that now houses the district's alternative programs, which about 200 students currently attend.

A majority plus one vote is needed to pass the supplemental levy and a two-thirds supermajority is needed to pass the construction levy.

— Casey Santee

FROM THE IDAHO FALLS POST REGISTER (PASSWORD REQUIRED)

Idaho State University prepares budget plans

POCATELLO (AP) -- Idaho State University is preparing to scale back on planned construction in case Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter decides to cut spending from the state's general fund.

Last week, Otter ordered top state administrators, institution leaders and department heads to revisit their 2009 budgets and

find ways to save money to offset a nearly 6 percent projected shortfall in state revenue. In a letter to the administrators, Otter said the revisions are necessary because

the downturns in the state and national economies that have left Idaho's general fund with \$174.3 million less than anticipated.

James Fletcher, ISU's vice president of finance, told the Idaho State Journal that the school anticipated the nation's declining economy and made provisions earlier this year to prepare for cuts on nonpersonnel spending.

Schools awarded fresh fruit, veggie grants

BOISE (AP) -- Thirty elementary schools across the state have been awarded grants to bring fresh fruits and vegetables to students.

State Schools Superintendent Tom Luna said the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Fresh

Fruit and Vegetable Program provides students with healthier snack options throughout the school day and helps teach students about the importance of healthy eating habits.

Among the schools awarded the grants was Coeur d'Alene's Bryan Elementary which was granted more than \$18,000, Juliaetta Elementary in north-central Idaho which received more than \$15,000 and Marsing Elementary which received more than \$20,000.